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SUBJECT: KUWAIT NATIONAL SECURITY BUREAU DEPUTY ON IRAQI
VISITS, IRANIAN THREATS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)
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¶1. (C) In a February 7 discussion with PolCouns, National Security Bureau Deputy Chief Shaykh Thamer Ali Al-Sabah said visits this week by former Iraqi PM Ibrahim Al-Jaafari and Vice President Tariq Al-Hashemi had gone "very well." Shaykh Thamer noted Kuwait's long-standing relationship with Iraq's Shia leadership, and said the steady stream of Shia leaders visiting Kuwait, such as members of the Al-Hakim family, sets Kuwait apart from others in the region. As for Al-Hashemi, Shaykh Thamer said the Kuwaitis made clear to him that the Sunni leadership needs to take a similar approach to bridge-building. Thamer said Iraqi Sunnis believe Kuwait has a special relationship, financial and otherwise, with the Iraqi Shia. He said Kuwait took pains to explain to Al-Hashemi that this is not the case. Al-Hashemi, he said, got the message. Thamer said Kuwait has recently stepped up its contacts with Iraqis across the board, noting Kuwait's advantageous position as a departure point for travel.

(Note: both the Al-Jaafari and Al-Hashemi visits received significant press coverage in Kuwait, with a high-profile series of senior-level meetings, diwaniyya stops, and cultural events.)

¶2. (C) Shaykh Thamer raised Iran, asking PolCouns whether U.S. naval operations in the Gulf signified the U.S. was moving closer to military action. PolCouns assured him that U.S. forces are there as a deterrent, not a provocation, and said the U.S. remains committed to a diplomatic approach to Iran that addresses Iranian behavior on many levels. Thamer said U.S. military action would be a "disaster" for the region in general and Kuwait in particular, and he hoped Washington was aware of this. Thamer said Kuwait believes Iranian influence in Iraq is pervasive and "much worse than you think." He said that Iran does not hesitate to throw its weight around in its interactions with Kuwait, noting a "direct correlation between Amiri visits to Washington and Iranian FM visits to Kuwait. Thamer urged that the U.S. talk directly to Iran. "The Iranians believe they are in a strong position in Lebanon and in Iraq," he explained, "and when they feel strong, they are more willing to compromise."

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